

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

UTILIZATION OF THE ARMY RESERVE'S RETENTION AND TRANSITION FORCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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In 1998, the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, formed a new staff agency, the Retention and Transition Division (OCAR-RTD), collocated with the U.S. Army Reserve Command (USARC) at Fort McPherson, GA. The objective of OCAR-RTD was to curb high attrition rates in the Selected Reserve, which were becoming a serious threat to end-strength. The means to achieve this end were provided in the fielding of a new 79V MOS (Retention and Transition NCO) in Fiscal Years 2001-2003.

This enormous investment in full-time staffing and money achieved its objective to reduce annual attrition by 10% over five years. The new 79V force has also been successful in achieving several accession missions that were, to varying degrees and at varying times, shifted between Recruiting Command, Human Resources Command, and OCAR-RTD. The original vision of the 79V Soldier as an honest broker serving the changing needs of Army Reserve Soldiers in both the Selected Reserve and the Individual Ready Reserve may however, have been compromised by the attachment of accession missions. These missions may encourage a "recruiter" numbers-based orientation rather than a "career counselor" Soldier-based orientation.

This project describes the development of the 79V Retention and Transition Force using Bruce Tuckman's (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing) model of team development. Using statistical data, interviews of key leaders, and surveys of retention and transition NCOs in the field, I will compare the original vision of the 79V Program with what has evolved today. I conclude with recommendations for the future.

UTILIZATION OF THE ARMY RESERVE'S RETENTION AND TRANSITION FORCE

Throughout the 1990s, the Army Reserve found itself increasingly challenged to maintain its assigned end of year personnel strength objective. The reason for this challenge was runaway attrition. The aggregate Army Reserve attrition rate reached an unprecedented 34% (37% for enlisted) in 1994.¹ The response to this flood of Soldiers leaving through the “back door” was to increase recruiting mission; try to push more Soldiers through the “front door”. This was expensive as well as futile, as each new accession cost approximately \$60K.² Simply to continue to increase the recruiting mission did not seem to be a satisfactory answer. Something needed to be done about the attrition problem in the Army Reserve.

This paper examines the Army Reserve's response to the attrition problem, which was the establishment of the Retention and Transition Program and the 79V Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The program was conceived “on the fly”, with unprogrammed personnel and financial requirements and fundamental disagreements about exactly how the 79V Soldiers were to be utilized in the field. The program has had six Chiefs in its eight years of existence, each of whom maintained a similar vision of utilizing the 79V Soldiers to assist unit commanders to create a positive training environment and influence Soldiers to continue serving in the Army Reserve through effective sponsorship, accountability, and career counseling. The degree to which the retention and transition force has been used to support this retention vision has, however, varied over the years due to external influences and direction.

Bruce Tuckman's well-known “Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing” Model of team development seems to describe the phases the retention and transition program has progressed through, and I will use it to organize this paper. I utilize this model somewhat arbitrarily, however, as it was intended to apply more to the dynamics of small group behavior. The transitions between phases had, in the case of the Retention and Transition Program, little to do with group dynamics and much to do with changes in focus from higher echelons.

The Army Reserve faces a unique challenge in retaining its Soldiers. In a 1991 report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, the United States General Accounting Office noted that “many of the problems in the reserve components are an inherent aspect of the reserve environment. Because reserve service is, in essence, a second job for most of the reservists, competing demands of their regular jobs and leisure time are important factors in attrition.” The report continues to note that “DoD has no uniform policy for dealing with reservists who fail to honor their obligation to participate in inactive duty training. Realistic enforcement options are limited by the voluntary aspect of reserve duty and the primarily part-

time nature of reserve participation.”³ This neatly sums up the challenge of keeping Soldiers in reserve units.

Attrition in the Army Reserve is not the same thing as in the active component. In the active component, the attrition rate is strongly related to the success of the commanders’ reenlistment programs. After Soldiers clear the training base and arrive at their units of assignment, the vast majority of Soldiers who “attrit” from the active component simply decide not to reenlist and leave active service at the end of their current enlistment. There is much more to Army Reserve attrition than failure to reenlist. In Fiscal Year 2000, only 11% of Selected Reserve (SELRES) losses were due to decisions not to reenlist (ETS Losses).⁴ Attrition, as it is measured by the Army Reserve, usually manifests itself by Soldiers transferring from the SELRES to the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) before their enlistments expire. Army Reserve leaders must continue to sell the Army to their Soldiers each and every month.

To begin to understand this difference it is important to first understand the difference between the SELRES and the IRR. The SELRES is composed of Troop Program Unit (TPU) Soldiers (Soldiers assigned to a Troop Program Unit – “drilling reservists” who form the bulk of the units), Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) Soldiers, and Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA). Simply stated, SELRES Soldiers are those assigned to units. End strength is assessed against the SELRES, and it is on the SELRES, and particularly the TPU Soldiers, that retention is focused. The IRR is composed of Soldiers who are inactive. They may or may not have a contractual obligation to serve in a TPU, but they don’t drill at units, and are not associated with a unit. The IRR represents a trained pool of Soldiers capable of transitioning to the SELRES with little difficulty. IRR Soldiers are mobilization assets, but they do not count towards the end of year strength objective.

The top four categories of Army Reserve losses (attrition) include not only those Soldiers whose enlistments expire, but also Soldiers who transfer to the IRR. The three most common types of IRR transfer include Voluntary Transfer, Unsatisfactory Participant, and “IRR No Show”. Together, these three types of losses comprised 47% of the SELRES losses in Fiscal Year 2000.⁵ A voluntary transfer is a Soldier whose enlistment is current, but who requests a transfer to the IRR. He probably, but not necessarily, has no further contractual obligation to serve in a TPU. An Unsatisfactory Participant is a Soldier who misses nine or more Unit Training Assemblies (UTAs – an authorized and scheduled period of unit inactive duty training activity of a prescribed length of time.⁶ A typical weekend Battle Assembly is composed of four UTAs) in a one year period. An IRR No-Show is an IRR Soldier who is ordered to TPU status, but who fails to report.

Most analysis pointed to a dearth in leadership at the first line leader level as being the most addressable factor in high attrition rates. Higher operational tempo, increased possibility of activation, low incentives, and other named causes were consistently trumped by leadership issues. When questioned about why they stopped coming to drill, Soldiers consistently cited lack of training opportunities, boring drill assemblies that had little to do with developing or maintaining combat readiness, and simply a feeling that their leaders did not know or care about them. The U.S. Army Reserve Command (USARC) Retention Program was developed to address these issues by improving and focusing unit level leadership on three sub-programs: sponsorship, soldier accountability, and career counseling.

The unit sponsorship program ensured each Soldier's first experience in the unit was a positive one, and that the Soldier was assimilated as rapidly as possible into the team. This seems self-evident in the active component, where unit level sponsorship is an ingrained norm. In the Army Reserve, it seemed difficult to generate the same sense of responsibility for subordinate Soldiers in junior leaders. Seasoned retention NCOs in the 1990s became accustomed to visiting units at drills and proceeding straight to "the sucking wall" – the wall that seemed to draw new Soldiers who didn't know what to do or who to ask. It was not uncommon for Soldiers to not even know who their first line leader was.

The soldier accountability program simply required that first line leaders know where their Soldiers were. This is a basic leader responsibility that had lapsed badly in the Army Reserve. First line leaders in the active component don't need to be told that they need to know the whereabouts and condition of their Soldiers. Indeed, supervisors in any enterprise can be expected to be concerned and attempt to contact employees who don't show up for work. Things had gotten to the point in the Army Reserve where first line leaders just assumed a missing subordinate had decided not to come to drill that month. The well-known story of the Army Reserve Soldier who was hospitalized for several months after a car accident and was transferred by his unit to the IRR as an unsatisfactory participant may be an "urban myth", but it is one that was quite believable. The soldier accountability program required first line leaders to immediately contact Soldiers who were absent from drill to determine and document the reason. In fact, first line leaders were encouraged to contact their Soldiers before drill to confirm intended attendance, attempt to overcome any difficulties the Soldier anticipated in making the drill, or to arrange for an RST (rescheduled training) if the Soldier required it.

The career counseling program aimed to create a long term place in the Army Reserve for the Soldier. It was little different from the reenlistment counseling program in the active component. It featured a series of interviews beginning with initial welcoming interviews and

ending with a reenlistment interview. In between was annual counseling sessions to be conducted by first line leaders. These annual interviews were designed to interactively develop a picture in the Soldier's mind of where he was in his Army Reserve career, where he wanted to go, and how he could get there. A four page Army Reserve Career Plan, USARC Form 83-R, served to guide these interviews and document their performance. Unfortunately, this aspect of leadership also seemed to be too difficult to accomplish. Because unit leaders are pressed to accomplish so much during short weekend drills, and lacked the unit level reenlistment NCO who delivers the reenlistment interview "cards" to remind leaders in the active component that they had interviews to accomplish sometime that month, this aspect of the retention program was uniformly lacking in the Army Reserve. Too often, the first time a Soldier was talked to about his career plans and reenlisting was when the unit administrator presented him with reenlistment papers to sign.

The existing retention force was far too small to truly implement the retention program throughout the Army Reserve. The small retention staffs in the field could be counted on to present training to commanders at annual training conferences, give them the required tools, and perhaps even visit some struggling units once or twice a year. But annual training and assistance visits only went so far in sustaining programs. These visits were all too often merely exercises in documentation, and the positive results did not last long.

Forming – 1994-2000

In 1994, the Chief, Army Reserve asked for a review of the state of recruiting and retention programs. This review, produced by a team of Soldiers and civilians (Office of Strategic Analysis and Liaison - OSAL) who reported directly to the Chief's deputy, produced the following observations:

- U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) had not met its recruiting mission and the cost of recruiting was continuing to escalate.
- Enlisted attrition was at its highest level in recent history (37%).
- Resources and focus for recruiting and retention programs for the Army Reserve were not balanced. \$40M and approximately 2100 AGR Soldiers and civilians were directed each year towards recruiting. \$2M and less that 300 AGR Soldiers were focused on retention.
- New accessions cost approximately \$60K per Soldier, while prior service accessions (from the IRR) cost approximately \$6K.⁷

In 1996 The Chief, Army Reserve requested the same team produce a staff assessment of the options necessary to bring the recruiting, retention, and transition (from the IRR to TPU) programs to a point that the processes would make meeting the end strength possible. Upon reviewing this assessment, the Chief directed:

- Remove the Retention Program from the purview of the [Strength Management] staff and make it a commander's program.
- Create a scorecard for commanders that includes metrics for retention.⁸

In 1997 the Army Reserve initiated the Commander's Retention Program. In response to the Chief of Staff, Army's direction to establish reportable retention goals, the Chief, Army Reserve set a goal of a 10% reduction of attrition over five years.⁹ A new staff section, USARC Retention, was created to provide guidance and track performance of the small retention staffs in the ten subordinate Regional Support Commands (RSC). With strong command emphasis from the very top of the Army Reserve, attrition dropped by 4% (30.4%) after two years. Clearly, command emphasis had reversed the upward trend of attrition, though it must be noted that this same emphasis may have caused some "holding of losses"; for while attrition dropped the Army Reserves' participation rate also decreased, indicating that some Soldiers who had stopped coming to drill had not been transferred to the IRR as required.

In 1998 the USARC Retention Office was redesignated the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve Retention and Transition Division (OCAR-RTD). Added to USARC Retention's Lieutenant Colonel, Sergeant Major and eight Master Sergeants was a Colonel who reported directly to the Chief, Army Reserve, a budget officer, a small admin section, and eight Majors. The first OCAR-RTD Chief, Colonel Elton Bruce, faced the formidable challenge of defining, resourcing, and implementing the new retention and transition program on the fly. His vision, recalled eight years later, "was to build and resource a strength management program that reduced the number of civil life gains required to meet the congressional strength".¹⁰ He had to show success while defining the strategy and objectives.¹¹ Colonel Bruce was closely advised by a member of OSAL, Ms. Annette O'Banion. The OSAL proposal for ultimately addressing the difficulty the Army Reserve was experiencing in retaining Soldiers was to put an AGR non-commissioned officer in each reserve center to focus and assist commanders in their retention programs. On this issue, OSAL had consulted extensively with passionate and dedicated Soldiers of the original USARC Retention Office, who were now the key leaders of the new OCAR-RTD. OSAL and OCAR-RTD knew that the tall pole in the tent was AGR retention Soldiers in the field. There were approximately 250 of these MOS 79S Retention NCOs in the program.¹² There were over 1000 reserve centers. The vast increase in AGR authorizations

required to support this “retention NCO in every center” concept was clearly beyond reasonable expectation. The AGRs needed to come from the existing force pool.

From the beginning OSAL focused on Recruiting Command as the bill payer. 1668 of the Army Reserve's AGR Soldiers were assigned to Recruiting Command,¹³ clearly the largest single investment of valuable AGR assets. OSAL directed their attention particularly to the IRR-TPU mission, which Recruiting Command had failed to meet in five of the previous nine years.¹⁴

The case OSAL developed for returning almost 1/3 of Recruiting Command's AGRs to USARC was that the Army Reserve would take almost 1/3 of Recruiting Command's USAR accession mission (the IRR-TPU piece) and accomplish it more effectively. Armed with statistics, forecasts, and this proposal, the Chief of the Army Reserve lobbied the Army leadership hard to build a case for this transfer of AGR Soldiers from Recruiting Command to USARC. Concurrently, the new OCAR-RTD began preliminary moves along this path from the very start. Indeed, the decision to change the name of the USARC Retention Office to the OCAR Retention and Transition Division in 1998 was made to demonstrate the intention to use AGR Retention Soldiers to perform transitions (IRR-TPU transfers). In October of 1999, the third iteration of USARC Regulation 140-6 was published, with its name changed from the USARC Strength Management Program to the USARC Retention and Transition Program, and proponency changed from USARC G1 to USARC RTD (later called OCAR-RTD). Included in this regulation was the first rudimentary guidance for the transfer of Soldiers from the IRR to TPU. RSC Retention and Transition Offices received their first modest IRR-TPU transfer goals (2800 transfers) from USARC RTD.¹⁵

In Fiscal Year 2000, the new Army Reserve Retention and Transition Program had been in place for two years, and the USARC/OCAR Retention and Transition Division for three. Attrition had indeed declined by over 2% per year.¹⁶ The Chief, Army Reserve and the Commanding General of Recruiting Command had set a precedent of shifting missions from USAREC to USARC by agreeing to a phased three year transfer of the USAR warrant officer recruiting mission, and USARC had demonstrated some success in this program that had languished in USAREC. The USARC Retention Office had, as its first Chief had hoped, demonstrated the ability to deliver on its proposals.

“Be careful what you ask for, because you may get it” never proved truer than in this campaign to wrest back some 500 AGRs from Recruiting Command. As part of NDAA 2000, Congress directed the Army to study the process, manner and organization of the Army Reserve recruiting effort. The study made recommendations in four areas: policy, operations, research, and organization. The most significant change in organizational design called for a

plan to separate non-prior service recruiting and prior service recruiting. The report recommended, and the Army leadership approved, moving the recruiting of IRR Soldiers from the purview of USAREC to the Army Reserve under the umbrella of the Army Reserve Retention Program. The Army Reserve was tasked to develop and implement a three year plan to assume ownership of the IRR-TPU mission. This plan moved responsibility for transferring a 13,000 per year IRR-TPU mission from USAREC to USARC, to be accomplished in yearly increments from Fiscal Year 2001 through 2003.¹⁷ OCAR-RTD had three months to launch the program.¹⁸

Storming – 2001-2003

The fielding of this enormous new force, in the space of only a few months was not surprisingly, chaotic. Selected for Phase I of this implementation was the 81st RSC, covering the eight southeastern United States, and the tiny 65th RSC (Puerto Rico). The existing 81st RSC AGR retention force would increase from 25 to 181 in only three months. 115 of the 81st RSC's new Retention and Transition Force (RTF) were 79R AGR recruiters from USAREC's 2d Recruiting Brigade. These Soldiers needed to complete the two week 79V Course before reporting for duty with the 81st. The rest of the new 79Vs were "new hires" off of the AR-PERSCOM AGR order of merit accession list. These new AGRs were required to attend both the two week AGR Entrance Training Course (AGRET) and the two week 79V Course at the Army Reserve Readiness Training Center (ARRTC) at Fort McCoy prior to reporting for duty at the 81st RSC. Since the ARRTC had not forecasted such an influx of students for either the AGRET Course or the 79V Course, the 81st did not actually get its full 79V force through the schoolhouse until December. Any realistic hope of achieving the first year's IRR-TPU mission was lost.

The story of the Phase I fielding of the retention and transition force in the 81st RSC serves as a sterling example of a higher headquarters (USARC) throwing out a partially formed concept to a subordinate headquarters (81st RSC) and hoping for the best. What the 81st did to eventually set the standard for the 79V Program was arguably the Army Reserve's top success story in Fiscal Year 2001. The part of the Phase I fielding story that is relevant to this paper is that once USARC managed to get the personnel resources needed to make [reserve] center based full-time retention support a reality, a sometimes bitter and always counter-productive debate emerged concerning the "transition" aspect of the new 79V job description. This debate hinged on the differences between the well developed and understood "recruiting"

skill set used by recruiters and what was expected of the retention and transition NCO. What did “transition” mean? Was it synonymous to recruiting?

The intent and vision of OCAR-RTD for the retention and transition NCO was consistently retention-centric. The shortfalls in personnel strength were more due to high attrition than low accessions, and in any case it was far preferable to retain more trained Soldiers than to recruit new ones. The USARC Retention Program was designed to correct key deficiencies in sponsorship, Soldier accountability, and career counseling. When this program received strong command emphasis beginning in 1998, positive results followed. It was clear however, that this positive trend was not likely to be sustainable without a vast increase in full-time retention Soldiers in the field to assist commanders in implementing and sustaining the program.

As stated earlier in this paper, the quest for the additional AGR manpower to make the presence of a full-time retention Soldier at every unit for every drill a reality, led inevitably to USAREC and the AGR recruiters assigned to it. The Chief of the Army Reserve owned these AGR recruiters, but the political reality was that he could not recover them without also relieving USAREC of an equivalent portion of their recruiting mission. This portion of the recruiting mission; the “bill”, as it were, was the IRR-TPU mission.

The “bill” for Fiscal Year 2001 was 5000 transfers from the IRR to TPUs. OCAR-RTD distributed this mission across the existing 79V force, with most of it (3408) falling on the 81st RSC’s newly expanded 79V force. This required a monthly “write rate” of over two. Each 79V Center Retention and Transition NCO would have to complete two or more IRR-TPU transfers each month. This was the same rate that had been maintained by USAREC’s 79R recruiters. Unless the AGR 79Rs had been grossly mismanaged, it could not be reasonably expected that once converted to 79V, they could continue to recruit at the same pace while also serving as full-time retention NCOs.

Disagreement over how to best achieve the IRR-TPU mission was an immediate source of friction between OCAR-RTD and the 81st. OCAR-RTD envisioned the new 79V’s interaction with Soldiers in the IRR to be one of counseling rather than recruiting. Each 79V would be responsible for knowing and counseling the IRR Soldiers in his local area. He would approach each IRR Soldier as a career counselor would:

- learning why the Soldier is in the IRR.
- determining what conditions in the Soldier’s life needed to change to warrant a transition into a TPU.

- keeping the Soldier informed of all opportunities for service in the Selected Reserve, to include the warrant officer program, direct commissioning, the AGR program, etc.
- at the very least, securing a reenlistment decision from the Soldier to maintain his status as a mobilization asset in the IRR.

In short, the 79V would extend the retention program to the Soldiers of the IRR. If successful, the result would be a more robust IRR, a truly “ready” component of the Ready Reserve, and a source of trained Soldiers to be approached to fill critical vacancies in units.

OCAR-RTD did not envision approaching the IRR as a recruiter would. Indeed, OCAR-RTD was careful to exclude the term “recruiting” from anything having to do with the 79V MOS. 79Vs would “transition” Soldiers between the IRR and TPUs. The IRR would be a personnel resource to be cultivated rather than merely harvested, and not simply a list of prospects for recruitment. IRR Soldiers would not be “recruited”, they would be more closely managed and when opportunity and desire to serve in a TPU merged, they would “transition” between the IRR and the SELRES (TPU/AGR/IMA). This orientation is clearly evident in the 1999 version of USARC Regulation 140-6, which directs in paragraph 7-2 (Prospecting) the 79V to make “every effort to contact the [IRR] soldiers to ensure they are provided an opportunity to continue service in a TPU, if desired.”¹⁹ This was not a recruiting orientation.

There may have been some officers at OCAR-RTD who believed the 79V force could “transition” Soldiers from the IRR at the same rate that USAREC had recruited them, but most did not. Certain that this enormous plus-up of retention Soldiers in the field would result in a significant improvement in retention, OCAR-RTD leaders felt justified in accepting risk in the IRR-TPU mission. The overall objective of the program was to maintain end strength, and the IRR-TPU mission was just one of three ways to achieve that objective. If USAREC would meet its non-prior service recruiting mission for the Army Reserve, while the new 79V force got a grip on the attrition problem, a shortfall in the IRR-TPU mission would be irrelevant.

The Commanding General of the 81st RSC saw things differently. Although himself a strong believer in the merits and potential of the retention program, he saw the IRR-TPU mission not as a goal to pay lip service to, but a commitment to the Congress,²⁰ and one of the most important tasks in the Army Reserve. In short, it was a critical mission that would be accomplished in full. Having once served as an Army recruiter himself, Major General Mike Mayo knew that accomplishing this mission would require a 100% recruiting effort by his 79Vs, using recruiting tactics in a sales-oriented approach based entirely on numbers and not on the

needs of the units or Soldiers involved. In the 81st RSC, “transition” was no more an acceptable term for what the 79Vs were doing than “recruiting” was at OCAR-RTD.

This disconnect had immediate implications. In addition to the unavoidably chaotic situation brought about in the 81st by this sudden fielding of such a large and high priority force, there resulted:

- A serious morale challenge in the 81st. Former 79R recruiters found that far from being relieved of recruiting duties, they were doing the same thing again with fewer resources. The rest of the 81st RTF was composed of newly “hired” AGRs, who had been told that their job would be to counsel TPU Soldiers, not recruit IRR Soldiers. None of them were happy about having to be recruiters, and very few of them were prepared for such work.
- An inefficient distribution of 79Vs to perform the IRR-TPU mission. The 81st RSC’s 79Vs had been positioned in the southeastern United States to perform retention duties in reserve units, not to recruit IRR Soldiers. One AGR 79V for every 250 TPU Soldiers in a reserve center served as the distribution plan. This resulted in clusters of 79Vs competing for the same local IRR pool, which was not related to the size of the local reserve units.
- A failure of the Army Reserve’s schoolhouse to prepare the new 79Vs for their duties. Besides being unprepared for the sudden influx of over 150 Soldiers for the 79V Course, the ARRTC lesson plans for this course focused on retention tasks. In accordance with the 1999 version of USARC Regulation 140-6, and in consultation with OCAR-RTD, the ARRTC Program of Instruction addressed the transition part of the job description as an administrative task to assist Soldiers requesting a transfer to a TPU. There was no preparation for the recruiting skills needed to find and convince a certain number of IRR Soldiers to transfer to TPUs each month.
- Confusion and frustration from the eight Direct Reporting Commands, general officer commands such as the 100th Division (Institutional Training), 142d Engineer Command and 335th Theater Signal Command in the 81st RSC region, who had been forced to give up their limited retention assets to the 81st. They expected the larger 79V force would be responsive to their requirements, which were typically greater retention support and focused (only certain grade and MOS Soldiers, of high quality) IRR-TPU support. They got a 79V force that

was dedicated to IRR-TPU numbers – any IRR Soldier, plugged in wherever he could be.

- Resistance from RSCs across the country. Although the 79V fielding was phased over three years, and only the 81st and 65th were fielded in FY 2001, the other RSCs with their much smaller 79V staffs also had a (proportionally smaller) IRR-TPU mission. They did not appreciate 79Vs from the 81st reaching into their regions to prospect, sell, and close IRR-TPU transfers into their units. Yet this is what the 81st, whose own units were mostly up to strength, had to do in order to generate IRR-TPU numbers.

For the short term, the “transition versus recruiting” debate was decided in favor of Major General Mayo and the 81st. If USAREC-sized IRR-TPU missions were to be met by USARC’s 79Vs, they would have to pursue proven recruiting practices. Colonel Karl Peterson, who had served as the USARC Retention Officer and then Deputy Chief of OCAR-RTD until June of 2000, returned as Chief of OCAR-RTD in June of 2001 to face a serious shortfall in the IRR-TPU mission that he could not ignore. Colonel Peterson, the founder of the USARC Retention Program and solidly in the “retention” camp on this issue, clarified the priority on IRR-TPU transitions and at the same time negotiated an IRR-TPU mission reduction from DA Personnel Command (PERSCOM) that enabled the new 79V force to claim “mission accomplished” in Fiscal Year 2001.

Fiscal Year 2002 saw the Phase II fielding of the 79V force, this time in the four RSCs that comprised the western United States. The lessons learned from the painful fielding of the 81st RSC were taken to heart, and this fielding went far more smoothly. With the first year out of the way however, OCAR-RTD’s emphasis on the IRR-TPU mission again slipped. The largest of the Phase II RSCs, the 90th RSC out of Little Rock, Arkansas, did not assume the recruiting orientation that the 81st RSC had proved necessary to achieve the second year’s IRR-TPU mission numbers, choosing instead to address its’ serious attrition problems by focusing the 79Vs on establishing retention programs in units. The 63d RSC in California, who like the 81st, was at or near 100% strength, did not see any logic in dedicating their 79Vs to an IRR-TPU mission and also focused their 79Vs on retention programs. OCAR-RTD was once again silent on the “recruiting or retention” issue, until the IRR-TPU mission shortfall again became an issue late in the year. Colonel Peterson convened a conference of Retention and Transition leaders at the end of the 3d Quarter of Fiscal Year 2002. He had again negotiated a mission reduction, and he spread the reduction out amongst the under-producing RSCs. By reminding the assembled Retention Officers that his input to their senior rater (the Chief of the

Army Reserve) would be strongly influenced by their focus on the IRR-TPU mission, Colonel Peterson finally clarified what OCAR-RTD considered important. Concurrently with this conference, the USARC Deputy Commanding General sent personal letters to each of the RSC Commanding Generals, clearly telling them of his priority on the IRR-TPU mission. The reduced IRR-TPU mission was met again in Fiscal Year 2002.

Fiscal Year 2003 saw the completion of the 79V fielding. There was no longer any confusion about the priority of effort, and the IRR-TPU mission was accomplished for the first time without a mission reduction. The program was widely seen as a success. USARC, following the lead of the 81st RSC, had proven that its' 79Vs, located in reserve centers instead of recruiting stations, could perform prior-service recruiting at the same pace as had USAREC. That it had never been the intention of the founders of the retention and transition program to field a recruiting force under the direct control of the Army Reserve did not prove to be important to the validation of the 79V MOS. The 79Vs were in place to stay, and they were closely associated with "recruiters" in most minds.

Norming: 2004-Present

Colonel Renee Finnegan took over as Chief, OCAR-RTD halfway through Fiscal Year 2003 to oversee the first truly successful IRR-TPU mission accomplishment of the program's history. Like all of her predecessors, her vision was to use the 79Vs primarily for retention duties, not as recruiters. Partway through Fiscal Year 2004 she was able to get the IRR-TPU mission dropped entirely, and placed her focus on reenlistments, getting the reenlistment bonus increased from \$5K to \$15K. She also focused the field force on reducing non-participants (increasing drill participation) and reducing attrition,²¹ those twin measurement pillars of a successful retention program in the Army Reserve.

Colonel Al Kose became the sixth Chief of OCAR-RTD (name changed to AR-RTD²²) in April of 2005. The performance metrics currently applied to the 79V Program (now called Army Reserve Career Counselors – ARCC) reflect an increased sophistication in measuring success of the retention program, but would be quite recognizable to the founders of the program.²³ The IRR-TPU mission is back, but at a far more manageable level (8000) than in Fiscal Years 2001-03.²⁴

Reenlistment rates were not deemed the problem to be addressed by the original OCAR-RTD team, but they are part of the mission now. AR-RTD achieved 101.5% of their reenlistment mission for Fiscal Year 2005.²⁵

Non-participant (NP) rate is now an AR-RTD metric. Its' calculation differs slightly from the Potential Non-Participant rate used by the USARC Retention Office and OCAR-RTD in the early years of the program, but its' basic utility as a check to make sure attrition is not being improved or maintained simply by not reporting losses remains sound. AR-RTD's goal of 6% NPs has not been met since participation began being measured this way in Fiscal Year 2002. The NP rate seems to have stabilized between 8% and 10%,²⁶ which was the ambitious goal set in 1998.

Attrition, the primary metric for measuring retention in the Army Reserve, also seems to have reached a steady state, running between 24% and 25.5% since Fiscal Year 2001.²⁷ Here too, although AR-RTD has set 23.3% as the goal,²⁸ a 24.4% attrition rate was the goal established in 1998 for a five year attrition reduction program.²⁹

The IRR-TPU mission (now called IRR-SELRES) is 8000 for Fiscal Year 2006.³⁰ Compared to the missions of Fiscal Years 2001-03, this represents a 40% reduction in the number of transfers required each month by each 79V. However, even a transition mission of less than one per month per 79V requires a focused effort in the field, and as of January 2006 the 79V force was almost 400 transfers behind their lead-line for achieving this mission in Fiscal Year 2006.³¹ 79Vs across the country tell me that IRR-SELRES is back with a vengeance now, as the 79V force strains once again to meet its' IRR-SELRES mission.

Over the years, OCAR-RTD has taken on several "special" accession missions. These have been missions that the 79Vs in the field are better situated to accomplish than the accession agencies that had been performing the missions. These missions, the 79R AGR Recruiter Mission and the Army Reserve Warrant Officer Accession Mission, have not been a heavy burden on the 79Vs in the field, who mostly contribute to these missions by advertising opportunities during monthly battle assemblies and assisting interested Soldiers in filling out their applications. These two missions remain, as well as a new one – Officer Direct Commissions.³²

Performing?

Has the Army Reserve's Retention and Transition Program reached a steady state? Is it serving the purpose it was intended for? Should it? This analyst, who served on the initial OCAR-RTD staff and was selected to lead the 81st RSC's RTF through its' initial fielding, hopes the answer to the first question is no, because it is not serving the purpose it was intended for. It is my strong opinion that the 79V Program should be focused on retention and career counseling rather than recruiting.

The officers and Soldiers associated with the 79V Program may be the most dedicated in the Army Reserve. They have persevered through an extremely challenging time of constant change, coinciding precisely with the beginning of the Global War on Terror. Those of us who were there at the beginning can look at where the program is now and truly say “good show”. The Army Reserve’s retention problem of the 1990s, measured by attrition and non-participation rates from 2001 to 2005, has been solved. At least, it has met the goals which seemed so very ambitious in 1998. It must be noted, however, that the extensive mobilizations and the stop-loss orders associated with Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have most likely contributed favorably to reduced attrition and non-participation. Speaking as one who has served in TPUs, and who has returned from war fully charged-up only to be disappointed by the same old business as usual in garrison, I believe that as Operation Iraqi Freedom winds down and the reserves come home, the Army Reserve will experience a sharp decline in retention. In order to be ready for this, I recommend the following.

The 79V must focus his attention only on the personnel readiness of the units he supports. The 79V should be working hard with his supported unit commanders, and like the unit commanders he should look at attrition, non-participation, and reenlistments as merely indicators of the success of his retention program. The key personnel readiness metrics for unit commanders are personnel strength and personnel MOSQ. The 79Vs should be measured against the same criteria. The 79V will best serve his units and be successful by aggressively implementing retention programs in his units and his local IRR population. He should be reaching out to secure only those IRR Soldiers who possess the quality and MOS needed by his supported units.

The IRR-SELRES mission must go. As long as there is a requirement placed on a 79V to transfer a certain number of Soldiers from the IRR into the Selected Reserve, the 79V will be encouraged (if not coerced) to achieve that number even at the expense of his supported units’ and the IRR Soldiers’ best interests. There is nothing wrong or immoral about the way Army recruiters go about their task of convincing young people to join the Army or prior-service Soldiers to join units, but the “sales orientation” required for successful recruiting is not compatible to the career counseling responsibilities of the 79V. The 79V, acting with a recruiting orientation instead of as an “honest broker” is prone to take actions that are not congruent to unit or Soldier readiness. Some of these actions include:

- Forcing unsuitable IRR Soldiers on unit commanders, possibly even with the unit commander or unit administrator knowing they are getting a “bad apple”. This is particularly likely when pressure to achieve an IRR-SELRES mission has come

from the very top down the chain of command to the unit commanders. In the 81st RSC, under Major General Mayo, this was referred to as “jamming the door open”.

- Similarly to the above case, forcing unit commanders to accept IRR transfers into positions that the Soldier is not qualified for (a “will train” accession), or forcing units to accept double, triple, or even quadruple slotting of IRR transfers into positions that are filled already, simply to achieve the transfer mission.
- Tempting unscrupulous 79Vs to limit “recovery efforts” of TPU Soldiers heading for a transfer to the IRR for unsatisfactory participation, only so they can then transfer them back to the same or other unit.
- Encouraging 79Vs to approach IRR Soldiers merely as “prospects” for transfer to a TPU, rather than as Soldiers to be counseled. Most Soldiers are in the IRR for a reason, and if that reason has not been addressed and corrected it serves little purpose to transfer the Soldier into a TPU.
- Encouraging 79Vs to extend their “prospecting net” far from their location in an attempt to meet a mission number. There were no boundaries for IRR prospecting in USAREC, but for the 79V to really be acting in the best interests of the IRR Soldiers and his units he should not be arranging transfers of Soldiers he does not know into units he has never seen.
- Causing 79Vs to work counter to the current guidance of the Chief of the Army Reserve to separate unsuitable Soldiers rather than taking the easy way out and transferring them to the IRR. A hard-pressed 79V is tempted to advocate the transfer so that his prospecting pool will grow by one.

Unfortunately, one of the second order effects of USARC’s success in demonstrating the same capability to effect IRR-TPU transfers as had USAREC, is that the IRR-SELRES mission is now firmly associated with AR-RTD. The staff at AR-RTD seems to have recognized that they can rid themselves of this mission only if someone else is willing to take it.³³ This development is not likely – it is a difficult mission. Only direction from the very top is likely to cause this mission to disappear entirely or be transferred to another agency. In order to achieve this, AR-RTD needs to demonstrate a “value added”, just as they did in 1999 when they pledged to do a better job recruiting IRR Soldiers if USAREC would give up a large share of the AGR recruiting force. There are two such “value added” offers to make to the Chief of the Army Reserve.

The Soldiers of the IRR sorely lack any sort of dedicated career management, and the retention and transition force is ideally suited to assist in this role. Human Resources Command

(HRC) is charged with providing “life cycle management” of the IRR, but is not staffed to even begin to meet this task. Just maintaining contact with this large group of Soldiers as they pursue their civilian careers independent of any contact with the Army Reserve is beyond the capability of HRC. This was evident from the beginning of the 79V effort, when IRR lists provided to OCAR-RTD by HRC (then called AR-PERSCOM) for prospecting proved to be about 10% accurate. The situation has not improved. Sergeant First Class Mark Grogan, a superb 79V in Paducah, Kentucky recently told me that his local IRR population, which is used to calculate his share of the IRR-SELRES mission, is 575. No less than 432 of those names list Fort Campbell as their address – the last known address of these Soldiers as they left active duty.³⁴ Master Sergeant Gregory Johnson, the 79V assigned to the transition point at Fort Campbell, conducted a detailed check and confirmed that only one of Grogan’s 432 IRR addresses was valid, and that one belonged a Soldier on active duty.³⁵ Needless to say, if Sergeant First Class Grogan shows up at Fort Campbell to interview these Soldiers, he will not find them there. Likewise, if HRC decides to mobilize them, the orders will not reach them.

A letter from U.S. Congressman John B. Larson and 41 other Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, dated October 4, 2004, requested the Government Accountability Office (GAO) undertake a comprehensive study to review the recruiting and retention efforts of the U.S. Armed Forces. This memo references an Army announcement that identified 27,600 IRR Soldiers either called-up or available if needed.³⁶ This represents about 24% of the total IRR.³⁷ I have found no documents that describe the portion of the IRR that HRC does not have accurate addresses for, but my experience of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the continuing frustration of 79Vs in the field tell me that this 24% “available if needed” portion of the IRR may be that portion of the IRR that HRC believes they are capable of contacting. If a team of analysts from HRC, OCAR-RTD, or some other agency were to randomly select a set of zip codes from the IRR database and hit the phones, as the USARC Retention Staff did in 1999, they would be fortunate indeed to have a 24% contact rate. They would also find that a good contact number on the IRR list does not a potential IRR-SELRES transfer make. Master Sergeant Brett Lantz, well-placed as an Area Manager supervising five to seven 79Vs in the 96th Regional Readiness Command (RRC) Retention and Transition Division to know the veracity of the IRR database, best articulated the problems with the IRR database that go beyond good contact information. He estimates that of the “good” phone numbers, approximately:

- 6% are AGRs or currently on active duty with another branch of the service.
- 8% have already ETS'd.

- 12% are receiving medical disability.
- 2% are not otherwise qualified to serve on active duty.³⁸

It is not uncommon for 79Vs to be missioned to transfer between 50-100% (or more) of that subset of their assigned portion of the IRR that is contactable and eligible for duty in a SELRES, just to make their mission for the year.

The IRR is a Ready Reserve asset that is not nearly as “ready” as the published numbers indicate. Getting a grip on the IRR will be an enormous undertaking, but it seems to be of strategic consequence during our extended campaign against transnational terrorism, and 79Vs can be the key to realizing success. The first step is a simply stated but difficult to implement paradigm shift. Soldiers must not believe that their military obligation ends when they reach the IRR. IRR Soldiers should be required to report to a reserve center once each year to update their records. This could be a paid duty day, reminiscent of the old IRR Muster Program, and the 79V at the reserve center would be the point of contact. Soldiers who fail to make this annual appointment should be subject to discharge from the Army Reserve under other than honorable conditions. The idea of gaining the cooperation of the Internal Revenue Service to match unknown addresses to known social security numbers should to be seriously examined by legal authorities and implemented if practical. AR-RTD has put 79Vs into the active component transition offices where they can help reduce the number of Soldiers who clear the installation without providing a valid forwarding address. These 79Vs need to stress to transitioning active component Soldiers the requirement to keep their addresses up to date until their enlistments fully expire. The 79Vs in the field need to have the ability to directly update the IRR database with correct addresses and phone numbers, as they are learned. They need to also be able to report the names of Soldiers whose current addresses are not known. Having established contact with an IRR Soldier in his area, the 79V needs to approach him as a career counselor, not as a recruiter. The result will be a more robust IRR, a truly “ready” component of the Ready Reserve, and a source of trained Soldiers to be approached to fill critical vacancies in units.

Another area where the 79V can provide an invaluable service is the Trainees, Transients, Holding and School (TTHS) account. TTHS is not a new concept for the active component, but it was adopted by the Army Reserve only recently, over a three year phase-in beginning in 2003 with the 81st RRC. The general idea behind TTHS was to take non-deployable Soldiers off of the unit commanders’ books and to provide the managerial oversight to ensure these Soldiers received the training to make them MOSQ and deployable as soon as possible. There was a proposal, generated by the Commanding General of the 81st RRC, to

assign the TTHS mission to the Retention Office, adding additional military and civilian personnel to form a TTHS battalion around the existing retention staff. This proposal was soundly rejected by OCAR-RTD, which was then struggling just to achieve the IRR-TPU mission. It is time to reconsider this proposal.

The general concept, that those Soldiers who are not MOS qualified are taken off the unit commander's books so he can focus his attention exclusively on his deployable Soldiers, while the TTHS Section of the RRC's G1 Office focuses on getting the Soldier MOSQ as quickly as possible has not resulted in a significant improvement in the time required to get them MOSQ. The RRC G1 Offices have been increased to manage the TTHS account for their command. What is missing is dedicated, face to face contact with the non-MOSQ Soldier by a full-time Soldier whose purpose is to keep his units' TTHS lists as short as possible. The 79V can provide this role, taking a personal interest in the Soldier, and agitating and coordinating to see to the Soldier's professional development.

These two recommendations are man hour intensive, but coupled with the 79V's active participation in unit retention programs would finally make the 79V a critically important personnel life cycle management asset, and the unit level focal point of personnel readiness. The 79V would be the first person to welcome a new member of a unit, and would ensure an effective retention program was in place to build a lasting place in the Army Reserve for this Soldier. If the time came in the Soldier's life that continued TPU service was not practical, the 79V would "sponsor" the Soldier into the IRR and keep track of him there, alert for the moment when changing circumstances made a return to a TPU in the best interests of both the Soldier and the gaining unit. The 79V would be fully conscious of his supported unit's vacancies, and work closely with USAREC to get them filled, in addition to prospecting himself for suitable IRR Soldiers to fill his vacancies. Finally, the 79V would make sure that every Soldier was qualified to perform his duties in his position, and would be the point man to get him qualified as soon as possible.

The 79V's efforts could be managed by examining his units' attrition rates, non-participation rates, reenlistment rates, size of this TTHS account, and the number of local IRR members he maintains a detailed folder on. The 79V's effectiveness, however, should only be measured by the personnel readiness of his units.

Endnotes

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² Ibid.

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Department of Defense Dictionary, available from <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/u/05635.html>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2006.

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⁸ Ibid, 2.

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¹⁰ COL (Ret) Elton Bruce, email interview by author, 23 January 2006.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² OCAR-RTD, "Retention and Transition, A Commander's Program," briefing slides, n.d.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ O'Banion, 1.

¹⁵ OCAR-RTD, "Retention and Transition, A Commander's Program," briefing slides, n.d.

¹⁶ O'Banion, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ MAJ Gary Bullard, "Retention and Transition Update", briefing slides, MG Bambrough Senior Leader Conference, 19 May 2001.

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²¹ COL Renee Finnegan, email message to author, 20 January 2006.

²² Denis Petcovic, "Retain Your Unit", briefing slides with note pages, Army Reserve Retention and Transition Division, 4 January 2006.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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³⁴ SFC Mark Grogan, email message to author, 12 January 2006.

³⁵ Master Sergeant Gregory R. Johnson, "IRR Soldiers With a Fort Campbell Address," memorandum for record, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, 6 October 2005.

³⁶ U.S. Congressman John B. Larson, "Larson and Colleagues Urge GAO to Investigate Overextension of Armed Forces," memorandum for immediate release, Washington, D.C., 4 October 2004, available from http://www.house.gov/larson/pr_041004.htm; Internet; accessed 20 February 2006.

³⁷ Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, *Reserve Component Call-up Procedures – A Primer*, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2006), 12.

³⁸ MSG Brett Lantz, email message to author, 27 February 2006.